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USSR/  
SUNKEN SUB

RATHER: For nearly two months, Soviet navy rescue ships were at work in a spot of north Pacific Ocean. Pentagon correspondent David Martin, tonight, tells us what they were looking for and what they found.

MARTIN: CBS News has learned of a major Soviet naval disaster. It occurred in June when a nuclear-powered submarine sank in the north Pacific. The fate of the submarine's 90-man crew is not known, but one intelligence source said there had almost certainly been substantial loss of life. The cause of the accident is not yet clear, but speculation centers on mechanical failure unrelated to the nuclear power plant. There is no evidence of radioactive contamination. The sub sank off the Kamchatka peninsula south of the Soviet naval base at Petrozavodsk. U.S. intelligence became aware of the sinking when it detected Soviet rescue vessels on the scene. Only in recent days, sources say, were the Soviets finally able to raise the sunken hull. It is the second known sinking of a Soviet nuclear-powered submarine. Sources said one was lost off Britain in 1970. More recently, one caught fire off Japan but was towed safely to port. The U.S. has lost two nuclear submarines, the Thresher, which went down off Cape Cod with 129 men aboard, and the Scorpion, which went down with 99 men in the mid-Atlantic. The loss of one nuclear submarine represents only a minor decrease in Soviet military power. But it is a first-class calamity for the Russian navy. In addition to the almost certain loss of some of their most highly trained sailors, there is the recovery operation costing hundreds of millions of dollars. Most importantly, there is the sudden loss of the confidence in one of the Soviet navy's front-line war machines. David Martin, CBS News, the Pentagon.